

## CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A binder comprising:  
a first panel;  
5 a second panel; and  
a ring mechanism between the first and second panels, the ring mechanism at least partially defining a spine that interconnects the first and second panels and that defines an interior spine surface and an exterior spine surface, the ring mechanism at least partially defining a portion of the exterior  
10 spine surface.
2. The binder of claim 1, wherein the portion of the exterior spine surface defined by the ring mechanism is metallic.
- 15 3. The binder of claim 1, wherein the ring mechanism defines a longitudinal axis, and wherein the portion of the exterior spine surface defined by the ring mechanism is curved in a cross-section taken substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis.
- 20 4. The binder of claim 1, wherein the ring mechanism includes a chassis configured to house a moving component of the ring mechanism, and wherein the chassis defines a portion of the exterior spine surface.

5. The binder of claim 1, wherein the spine is further defined by a spine panel connecting the first and second panels, and wherein the ring mechanism is connected to the spine panel.

5 6. The binder of claim 5, wherein the spine panel includes an interior surface and an exterior surface, and wherein the ring mechanism is mounted to the exterior surface of the spine panel.

7. The binder of claim 6, wherein the spine panel defines an aperture  
10 extending between the interior surface and the exterior surface, and wherein the ring mechanism includes a ring extending through the aperture.

8. The binder of claim 6, wherein the spine panel defines an aperture  
15 extending between the interior surface and the exterior surface, and wherein the ring mechanism includes a trigger extending through the aperture.

9. The binder of claim 5, wherein the spine panel includes an end having a notch formed therein, and wherein the ring mechanism includes a trigger extending through the notch.

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10. A binder comprising:  
a first panel;  
a second panel;  
a spine panel connecting the first and second panels, the spine  
5 panel having an exterior surface and being made of a first material having a  
hardness; and  
a hardened shield mounted on the exterior surface and being made  
of a second material having a hardness greater than the hardness of the first  
material.

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11. The binder of claim 10, wherein the spine panel has a height in the  
longitudinal direction of the binder mechanism and the shield extends more than  
20% of the height of the spine panel.

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12. The binder of claim 10, wherein the spine panel has a height in the  
longitudinal direction of the binder mechanism and the shield extends more than  
50% of the height of the spine panel.

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13. The binder of claim 10, wherein the spine panel has a height in the  
longitudinal direction of the binder mechanism and the shield extends more than  
75% of the height of the spine panel.

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14. The binder of claim 10, further comprising a ring mechanism,  
wherein the hardened shield comprises a ring mechanism chassis.

15. The binder of claim 14, wherein the spine panel defines an aperture, and wherein the ring mechanism includes a ring extending through the aperture.

5 16. The binder of claim 14, wherein the ring mechanism is metallic.

17. The binder of claim 14, wherein the ring mechanism includes a chassis that defines an exterior spine surface extending from the exterior surface of the spine panel.

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18. The binder of claim 17, wherein the ring mechanism defines a longitudinal axis, and wherein the chassis is curved in a cross-section taken substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis.

19. A binder comprising:  
a first panel;  
a second panel;  
a spine panel connecting the first and second panels and having an  
5 opening through the spine panel; and  
a ring mechanism mounted to the spine panel and having a ring  
positioned through the opening.

20. The binder of claim 19, wherein the ring mechanism is mounted on  
10 an exterior surface of spine panel.

21. The binder of claim 19, wherein the spine panel includes three  
openings and the ring mechanism includes three rings, each ring being positioned  
through an opening.  
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22. The binder of claim 19, wherein the ring mechanism includes two  
hinge blades.

23. A ring mechanism comprising:  
a chassis having a substantially continuous longitudinally-  
extending surface and two longitudinally-extending edges connected to the  
surface and defining an opening;  
5 a ring actuator positioned within the chassis between the two  
edges; and  
a ring coupled to the actuator and extending through the opening  
away from the surface.
- 10 24. The ring mechanism of claim 23, wherein the ring actuator  
comprises two hinge blades.
25. The ring mechanism of claim 24, wherein each hinge blade  
engages a respective one of the edges.
- 15 26. The ring mechanism of claim 23, further comprising three rings.
27. The ring mechanism of claim 23, wherein the chassis defines a  
longitudinal axis, and wherein the surface is curved in a cross-section taken  
20 substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis.